

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, Southwest
Washington, DC 20250-1590

July 7, 2023

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Administrator Ducheneaux,

We write to you today to request you immediately approve emergency grazing on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract acres in Iowa due to long-term drought conditions and loss of forage.

For the last three years, our farmers have faced derechos, floods, and now one of the worst continued droughts in recent memory. While experiencing these devastating weather events, record high inflation, and increasing interest rates, our farmers continue to be the breadbasket of the world. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, 58% of the Midwest is now in moderate to extreme drought (D1-D3), compared to just 8% five weeks ago.¹ In Iowa, 2.2 million Iowa residents live in areas of drought, and our livestock producers need immediate relief. When our farmers suffer, our entire country suffers. In the coming days there is not projected to be any relief, and the drought will only continue to worsen the situation on the ground. This stresses not just our farmers and ranchers, but all of our rural communities who rely on the agricultural industry. All 99 counties in Iowa are experiencing drought, with the vast majority in moderate to extreme drought.

While the rainfall we've received in 2023 is significantly less than average, we must also recognize the lack of subsoil moisture due to the dry conditions over multiple years and how it's amplified the circumstances. This drought has severely impacted our pastures and has limited our grazing capacity. Additionally, dry conditions have dwindled new hay production. Without adequate forage, producers are forced to make production decisions like selling some of the herd they've spent years and sometimes generations building. It's a tough reality of agriculture, but USDA can help.

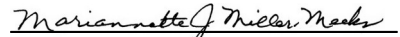
CRP contract acres can provide immediate relief to livestock producers who need to give their pastures a rest to allow for regrowth or to provide the necessary forage needed to maintain and care for their livestock. Therefore, we strongly urge you to immediately approve emergency grazing of CRP contract acres. Additionally, please be prepared to open emergency haying in eligible drought-stricken counties immediately upon the completion of the primary nesting season. Iowa's livestock producers need ample time to utilize this much-needed forage, and expediting this process to allow for approved haying on eligible acres would provide the help needed. We look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

¹ <https://www.drought.gov/drought-status-updates/drought-status-update-midwest-us-2023-06-23#:~:text=Current%20Conditions,just%208%25%20five%20weeks%20ago.>

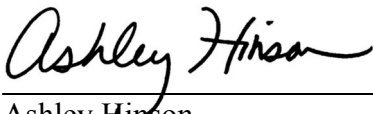
Sincerely,



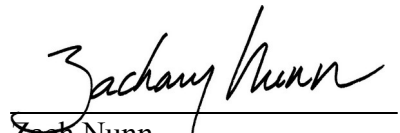
Randy Feenstra
Member of Congress



Mariannette Miller-Meeks,
M.D.
Member of Congress



Ashley Hinson
Member of Congress



Zach Nunn
Member of Congress



Charles E. Grassley
United States Senator



Joni K. Ernst
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